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The Caverns of Luray
Page County, Va.

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THE CAVERNS OF LURAY,

PAGE COUNTY, VA.,

At Luray Station, Shenandoah Valley Railroad.

☞ THE SHENANDOAH VALLEY RAILROAD is the ONLY RAIL ROUTE to the Caverns of Luray, and is the only line to the White Sulphur, the Warm, Hot, Healing, and other Mineral Springs of Virginia that admits of a

STOP-OVER AT LURAY TO VISIT THE CAVERNS.

(Editorial Correspondence Reading, Pa., Times and Dispatch, June 25th, 1881.)

ONE OF THE GREATEST NATURAL CURIOSITIES IN THE WORLD—SOME OF ITS ATTRACTIONS—HOW IT WAS DISCOVERED.

AN eight-hours' ride from Reading through four of the most beautiful valleys in the world, will take you to the recently-discovered, but already widely-known, Caverns of Luray, in the State of Virginia. During the past few months thousands of visitors have already wended their way to see this great natural curiosity and geological wonder, and the universal verdict, if it could be ascertained, would no doubt be :—"The half had not been told us." Upon the arrival there of a party from Reading and Lebanon, a few days ago, they immediately repaired to the cave, which they entered, accompanied by two guides of experience. For two hours, winding through miles of corridors, down by the sides of gaping chasms, then up, way up, among the domes of giant halls, the visitors kept close to the heels of the guides, who, whenever a particularly striking feature of the cave was reached, proceeded to enhance the value of the sight by means of an illumination with magnesium tape.

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Down in these earth-imprisoned realms of crystal, where the echoes of human foot had not been heard for ages, the trembling fancy of the explorer must have almost shuddered in apprehension of meeting impalpable impressions of some kind at every turn of the body. The gloom of the fretted corridors—the yawning chasms telling of mystery and night and danger—the crystal monuments and alabaster colums, high and vast—the crypts, cloisters, and cathedral-like apartments of this mystic under-world—the glittering pendants and pearl-like formations on every hand—must have filled the eye of the discoverer, as it fills the eye of the visitor nowadays, with a feeling of wondering awe and speechless admiration. There are statues no bigger than a lady's finger—others like "the great giant Christopher." Here and there you will find quiet pools and peaceful lakes which the winds of heaven have never kissed—cascades which appear to the eye of fancy as if the waves had been leaping over each other's shoulders into a pool below and frozen as they fell. At one place, "a nest from which the laughing birds have taken wing;" at another, a riding-whip as perfect as if chiseled by the hand of Phidias, the sculptor of the gods; at another, still statuettes chaste as Parian marble and graceful in outline as the poetry of art itself could make it. As

> "In the elder days of Art,
> Builders wrought with greatest care
> Each minute and unseen part:
> For the gods see everywhere,"

so in these realms of the fanciful and picturesque there has been wrought out such forms of beauty and wonder by the architect of Time as to challenge the severely critical taste of the most æsthetic beholder. Like the excavations made in the baths of Titus and other Roman buildings, we have here forms light, fantastic, abounding in transformations from the animal to the vegetable, and mingling all the natural kingdoms

in the most grotesque confusion. There are in these combinations of the picturesque with the statuesque, resemblances approaching at times the most advanced qualities of the sculptor's highest art. Indeed, it needs but a little play of the imagination to people these dusky chambers with conservatories rich with crystallized leaves and blossoms, with canopies of snow and ice, with crystal streamlets over which the listening nymphs hum their peaceful tunes. Marvelous in form and prodigal in number are these beauties scattered on every hand, as if the Frost King had breathed out the dearest songs of his life into the cavernous air and they had been transfixed there.

The grandeur of these scenes—embodying millions of the most curious and beautiful forms which the fantastic brain of fairies could conceive, from tiny, trickling rills and flowers and pieces of drapery to carved and fluted columns, groups of statuary and arched domes of imposing dimensions—makes one feel as if he were in the enchanted abode of the subterranean gods—as if he were in the presence of a world of wonders whose beginning antedated by uncounted ages the history of the oldest race known to man. The most graphic pen must fail in the portrayal of the varied beauties of these wonderful caverns, and the picture to be fully appreciated must itself be brought face to face with the beholder.

The roof of the cave is said to average from one hundred and fifty to two hundred feet in thickness and to consist of an immense bed of limestone rock, through which the water soaks from the surface, each drop, inpregnated with limestone, depositing its mite, thus beginning the formation of stalactites and stalagmites, which it takes centuries to bring to respectable proportions. Dr. Porter, of Lafayette College, himself a distinguished scientist, in a recent lecture, quotes an eminent brother scientist as saying, concerning the prostrate column weighing one hundred and seventy tons, which some convulsion of nature must have thrown from its position, that four thousand years must have passed since its fall, and that seven

millions of years were consumed in its formation. This calculation is based upon the probable time it took to form the present sizes of the vertical stalactites which have formed on the fallen column. No wonder another distinguished son of science, Prof. Collins, of New York city (now in search of Polar stalactites), who visited the cave and looked at this column, confessed all his preconceived ideas of time stranded. "I am not familiar," said he, "with the hypothesis upon which the calculations are based, but when the *savants* assert that it required seven millions of years to give this fallen column its present diameter, I feel like 'putting off my shoes' and standing on this sloppy stone, for it certainly must be 'holy ground' where I stand." The fallen column is about twenty feet in length by fourteen in diameter. As it is but a simple fragment of the ancient pillar before it fell, gauging its probable length by the pillars now standing, its original height, it is claimed, could not have been less than fifty feet, and its entire weight four hundred and twenty-five tons.

Another of the wonders is the Cathedral, or Organ Room, with Organ. Here is another of those remarkable resemblances to familiar objects with which these caverns abound. The stalactites, graduated in size like the pipes of an organ, produce, when struck with the knuckles or a piece of wood, real musical sounds, and so numerous are the pipes that the organ has all the capabilities of the xylophone, like which it must of course be played to properly develop its sweet-sounding notes. Then there is the Giants' Hall—magnificent and awe-inspiring; the Spectre, a column of pure white rising out of a chasm five hundred feet long, seventy-five feet deep, and fifty feet wide; the Saracen's Tent, whose softly-draped figures are guarded by grim sentinels; the Lost Blanket, a wonderful formation; Diana's Bath, Frozen Fountain, Cemetery, Oberon's Grotto, Titania's Veil, Cinderella leaving the Ball-room, and many other places of interest.

One of the most remarkable features of this realm of darkness and dampness is the life that exists there. According to

Dr. Porter, the living creatures are bats and rats and spiders, the first two doubtless finding their way to light and food through crevices in the roof, and the spiders living on the pod-rules, which, in turn, subsist on the mold, the vegetable growth of the cave. The only human relic found in the cave is an encrusted human skeleton, lying in the bottom of a pit, which the celebrated Prof. Leidy, of Philadelphia, who made a successful examination, pronounced to be that of a full-grown man.

Those who have made matters of this kind a study, unhesitatingly assert that nothing so vast, so varied, so magnificent, exists in any other cavern known to man. It is stated that its unsupported spans are vaster than any of the Centennial buildings at Philadelphia; that the roof of its highest room is one hundred feet, from which is suspended the most enormous stalactite in the world; that it is by far more interesting and beautiful than the Mammoth Cave; that every form known to similar subterranean cavities is present there, with the advantage of new and peculiar forms known only to this cave, and that the cavern is older than the tertiary period.

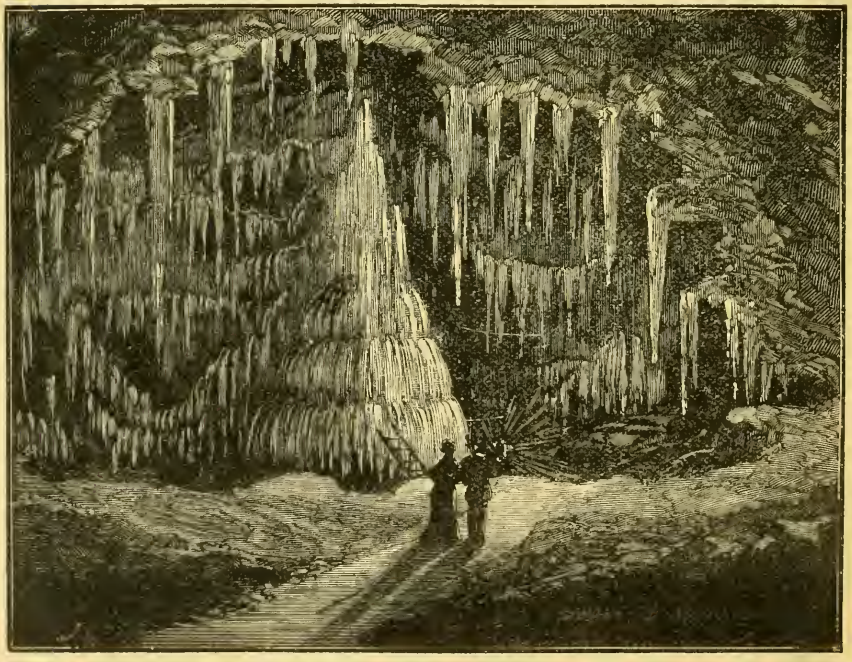
We do not wonder at the incredulity with which such accounts as these are received, but having seen what we have here feebly attempted to describe, we must challenge Barnum's claim to having "the greatest show on earth," for the Luray Caverns must hereafter be accorded all the honor and glory of such a comprehensive distinction.

The cave was accidentally discovered in digging down through a sinkhole some two years ago by Mr. Campbell, a professional cave hunter, who was joined in the enterprise by a Mr. Stebbins. In order to obtain a title to the opening, these men paid liberally such as they employed to assist them, until they could purchase the property. Afterwards the former owners commenced litigation to regain their property, which is now in the hands of a company who paid the sum of $40,000 for it, and who have already expended $30,000 in opening up the caverns and putting down board walks for a distance of

several miles. The same property had been sold for a few hundred dollars only a few years before. Like all great caves, it is in a limestone region, and covers an extent in circular area of some five or six miles. The entrance to the cave is through the basement of a two-story frame house on the side of the mountain, where the visitors purchase tickets of admission at a dollar a head. Passing through the entrance, which is twenty feet high by eighty feet wide, the party soon came in sight of the chief places of interest already described.

The atmosphere of the cave is pure, the temperature averaging fifty-nine degrees, winter and summer, not being affected by changes from without. The entire passage through it can be made without getting in the least wet or muddy.

T. C. Z.



THE

LURAY CAVE AND HOTEL CO.

EXCELLENT MEALS AND LUNCHES are served at the EXCURSION HOUSE RESTAURANT of the LURAY CAVE AND HOTEL COMPANY, which is close to the Shenandoah Valley Railroad Depot, at Luray Station.

These Meals and Lunches are recommended by the Railroad Company and are the only ones served near the station.

Persons visiting or passing through Luray will find it greatly to their comfort and pleasure to patronize the Excursion House.

ALL TRAINS STOP AT LURAY FOR MEALS.

PLEASE NOTIFY TRAIN CONDUCTORS OF MEALS DESIRED, OR OF INTENTION TO VISIT THE CAVERNS.

Passengers going North or South, stopping over for the next train, will have ample time to visit the CAVERNS OF LURAY, which are but one mile distant from the railroad station.

Authorized conveyances will be found in waiting to convey passengers to and from the Caverns. Tickets are for sale at the Office.

BY PURCHASING TICKETS AT THE OFFICE:

Fare from R. R. Station to the Caverns and return, . . 25 cents.
Admission to the Caverns (including Lights and Guide), . $1.00.

RATES AT EXCURSION HOUSE:

Breakfast, 50 cents. Dinner, 75 cents. Supper, 50 cents.
Lunches, by the Card.

PASSENGERS ARE REQUESTED TO REPORT ANY INCIVILITY ON THE PART OF EMPLOYEES.

3.60 "Hall of the Giants." 3.60

Caverns of Luray.

Stalagmites. Heligmites. Stalagtites.
Entrance Hall. Fluted Columns. Garden of the Gods.
Muddy Lake. Natural Bridge.
Conkling's Profile. Punch and Judy.
Fish Market. Pluto's Chasm. Mirror Lake.
Alabaster Scarfs. Crystal Spring. Grotto of Oberon.
Bridal Chamber. Lost Blanket. Titania's Veil.
Breakfast Shawl. Snow Bank. Frozen Fountain.
Musical Organ. Fallen Column. Angel's Wing.
Breakfast Bacon. Human Skeleton. Ball Room.
Blacksmith Shop.

The above views are among the beautiful objects to be seen in the MAGNIFICENT CAVERNS OF LURAY—under the glare of the

Electric Light.

For the benefit of those who are unable to leave their business during the week we will run a

SPECIAL TRAIN

Sunday, Oct. 9th, '81,

BALTO. & POTOMAC DEPOT,

Leaving at 9 a. m.; returning, reach home at 10.30 p. m.

FIVE HOURS at the CAVERNS.

Fare, Round Trip, Including Admission to Caves, $3.60. Children, 5 to 12, $2.30.

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